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## Understanding the Connections between Self-perceptions and Future Expectations: A Study with Spanish and Portuguese Early Adolescents<sup>☆</sup>



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### ABSTRACT

This paper studies the relationships between Spanish and Portuguese adolescents' positive self-perceptions (self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy) and future expectations. The sample includes 534 adolescents, aged 12–16 ( $M = 12.54$ ,  $SD = .77$ ). Despite the economic instability in southern European countries, adolescents from this study showed positive self-perceptions and high future expectations, with some significant differences related to sex and nationality. Regression analyses show the predictive capacity of self-perceptions for future expectations. Besides, the structural equations models confirm that there is a positive causal effect of self-perceptions on the future expectations of the Spanish and Portuguese adolescents. The main implication of this research is to strengthen the self-confidence of the younger generation during adolescence. This will have a great impact on the development of career goals and the perceived likelihood of realizing one's goals in the future. This issue is essential to keep qualified adolescents in their own countries.

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## Las relaciones entre autopercepciones y expectativas futuras: un estudio con preadolescentes españoles y portugueses

### RESUMEN

Este trabajo estudia la relación entre las autopercepciones (autoestima, satisfacción vital y autoeficacia) y las expectativas de futuro de adolescentes españoles y portugueses. La muestra incluye 534 adolescentes, con edades comprendidas entre los 12 y 16 años ( $M = 12.54$ ,  $DT = .77$ ). A pesar de la inestabilidad económica de los países del sur de Europa, los adolescentes de este estudio manifiestan autopercepciones positivas y altas expectativas de futuro, con algunas diferencias significativas con respecto al sexo y la nacionalidad. El análisis de regresión muestra la capacidad predictiva de las autopercepciones sobre las expectativas de futuro. Además, los modelos de ecuaciones estructurales confirman el efecto causal positivo de las autopercepciones sobre las expectativas futuras de los adolescentes españoles y portugueses. La implicación principal de esta investigación es fortalecer la autoconfianza de las nuevas generaciones durante la adolescencia. Esto tendrá un gran impacto sobre el desarrollo de objetivos profesionales y la probabilidad percibida para cumplir los objetivos en el futuro. Esta cuestión es esencial para mantener a los adolescentes cualificados en sus propios países.

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#### Palabras clave:

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### Introduction

Southern European countries have been heavily affected by economically adverse circumstances. National unemployment rates rose in 2015 to 12–13% in Italy and Portugal and to 23–25% in Spain and Greece (Eurostat, 2015). These rates were higher among youths under the age of 25 (31.2% in Portugal, 40.9% in Italy, and

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nearly 50% in Spain and Greece). Regarding sex differences among youths from Spain and Portugal, data show higher unemployment rates among girls (47.1% in Spain and 33.6% in Portugal) than among boys (46.5% in Spain and 30.7% in Portugal), although it is not known that these differences are significant. As a consequence of a lack of employment, more highly qualified young people are migrating to central and northern European countries. The starting point of this study is the interest to know the future expectations of adolescents from these countries in this historic moment, particularly in times when the economic circumstances do not work in young people's favor. Bengtson, Elder, and Putney (2012) point out the importance of historical conditions and change for understanding individual development.

Future expectations have been defined as beliefs about the probability that a specific event will occur in the future (Oettingen & Mayer, 2002). Previous research has revealed the association between future expectations and higher engagement (Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007), increased persistence to complete tasks (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004) and better academic performance (De Volder & Lens, 1982).

There are individual differences in the construction of these expectations. Future expectations are built in the context of other self-perceptions: the existence of self-confidence at the present makes the person able to imagine a more positive future and hope for better future results (Sánchez-Sandoval & Verdugo, 2016). In this paper, we analyze the relationship between the future expectations of early adolescents in two southern European countries (affected by the financial crisis), Spain and Portugal, and other self-perceptions (self-esteem, life satisfaction and self-efficacy). It is important to analyze now the early adolescents in order to understand future generations.

#### *Self and future expectations*

Self-perception plays an important role in identity construction, one of the main tasks of adolescence. Recent studies have emphasized self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy as concepts to consider when it comes to self-evaluations (Reina, Oliva, & Parra, 2010). They all have an emotional impact because they refer to the way one perceives and evaluates different personal aspects.

Rosenberg (1986) defined self-esteem as an evaluative aspect of the self-concept based on the individual's overall perception of himself/herself. Life satisfaction, another self-perception, is conceptualized as a cognitive dimension of subjective or personal well-being, which, in turn, is considered a psychosocial component of quality of life (Galíndez & Casas, 2010). Self-efficacy refers to the perception of one's ability to organize and execute the necessary actions to attain certain achievements or outcomes (Bandura, 1997). It has to do with the perception about the ability to achieve a goal or a task. Although these concepts are different they tend to be interrelated. For example, feelings of self-efficacy will influence an individual's degree of engagement and persistence in performing tasks, which will affect task resolution, with the following impacting self-esteem (Schunk & Meece, 2006). Positive self-evaluations about these aspects will encourage adolescents to act, motivating them to pursue their life objectives.

The maturation of adolescents' cognitive abilities, including the understanding of time, contributes to the process of identity construction. This includes the integration of the *self* in the past, present, and future. This turns adolescence into a very important period for individuals to think about their future possibilities and expectations. The extent to which people expect that an event will actually happen influences planning and setting goals, guiding their behavior and development (Bandura, 2001; Nurmi, 1991; Seginer, 2008).

Certain constructs of the self –such as self-assessment and stability– are important in adolescents' tendency to orientate themselves toward the future (Seginer, 2009). In general, people with positive feedback about themselves will feel confident to carry out current projects and will also have a good future. A recent work on self-esteem in a sample of Israeli Jewish teenagers showed that self-esteem was positively associated with future orientation (Seginer & Shoyer, 2012). Castro and Sánchez-López (2000) have reported associations between satisfaction in different life areas and the achievement of life goals in the present and in the future. Besides, Jackman and MacPhee (2017) found positive correlations between future expectations and self-esteem and they even pointed out that these variables may serve as protective factors against engaging in risky behavior during adolescence.

Some researchers (Sanjuán Suárez, Pérez García, & Bermúdez Moreno, 2000) emphasize the limited future expectations of people with low self-esteem and negative feelings about their abilities. A study of the future aspirations of urban adolescents (Sirin, Diemer, Jackson, Gonsalves, & Howell, 2004) also supports the idea that such feelings of capability, along with personal skills (like self-reliance), were closely related to what young people might or might not do in the future. Galicia Moyeda, Sánchez Velasco, and Robles Ojeda (2013) also highlight that individuals' beliefs about their effectiveness to control events that affect their lives influence the choices they make, their aspirations, and their levels of effort and persistence. In this sense, expectations of success also depend on people's confidence in their intellectual abilities and on task difficulty (Kaplan Toren, 2013).

The arrival of pubertal changes at the beginning of adolescence has a significant psychological impact that influences adolescents' self-perceptions and personal identity. These self-perceptions tend to be more negative as a result of the continuous adaptations that young people have to do regarding the personal and social changes they are facing (Sánchez-Sandoval, 2015). Coelho and Romão (2017) also showed in their study that students retained at the end of 5th grade had greater declines in all self-perceptions.

Despite this slight decrease, their appraisals of themselves and of their future are generally very positive. Schmitt and Allik (2005) indicated that these positive self-evaluations are culturally universal. One of our interests is to know about these positive evaluations and future expectations among early adolescents from two different countries (Spain and Portugal).

#### *Contextual factors and future expectations*

The role of contextual factors in the construction of global future expectations in adolescence has received little attention, although other related concepts, like Future Time Perspective (FTP) and temporal attitudes, have been analyzed. Maybe, academic expectations is one of the dimensions that have been more studied, mainly researchers have examined contextual factors that affect academic expectations (Menéndez, Calvo, & Caro, 2016). The formation of the time perspective is related to many factors: some are learned in the process of socialization, cultural values, religion, education, socioeconomic status, family model etc. (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). FTP may be influenced by the development of the individual's lifetime, profession, and political or economic instability, in addition to personal experiences. There is clear evidence of the influence of cultural aspects on the FTP: people in disadvantaged educational and socioeconomic conditions have restricted FTP (Nuttin, 1985). Other aspects such as norms, values and living conditions have also shown a relationship with adolescents' future orientation (Seginer, 2009; Wade, 2008). Corica (2010) highlighted the geographical context as an important element configuring representations about the future. Furthermore, studies conducted by the Spanish Youth Institute (INJUVE, 2012) indicated the trend of young Spaniards to have

a more positive self-perceptions compared to the rest of Europe. Spain has one of the lowest percentages of people who assess their health as poor or very poor. Danish, Lithuanian, Slovenian and Norwegian adolescents have the most negative assessments, with Portuguese adolescents topping the list.

The current study explores these personal and contextual variables, and analyzes the associations between them in a sample of early secondary school students. Additionally, we study the possible variations of these variables and their associations in Portuguese and Spanish students. The present study aims to: (a) analyze whether there are significant relationships between self-evaluations (self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy), and future expectations in Spain and Portugal; (b) analyze possible similarities between Spanish and Portuguese adolescents in each of these variables; (c) analyze the predictive capacity of personal (self-evaluations, age and sex) and contextual variables (nationality) for future expectations; and (d) analyze the causal effect of self-evaluations on the expectations of Spanish and Portuguese adolescents.

In relation to these overall aims, we tested the following hypothesis: (1) higher levels of positive self-evaluations are associated with higher future expectations, in Spain and Portugal; (2) self-evaluations and future expectations of Spanish and Portuguese adolescents are similar; (3) personal and contextual variables explain the variability in future expectations; and (4) there is a positive causal effect of self-evaluations on the future expectations of the Spanish and Portuguese adolescents.

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 534 adolescents (267 Spanish and 267 Portuguese) at the same level of education (1st grade of Secondary Compulsory Education in Spain and 7th grade in Portugal), aged 12–16 years ( $M=12.54$ ,  $SD=.77$ ). This study is part of a wider project about Spanish adolescents' well-being and future expectations. A random selection was made to extract 267 adolescents from the Spanish sample. Portuguese participants were selected using a convenience sample. Preliminary chi-square test and  $t$ -test indicated no significant differences between the Spanish and Portuguese students by sex and age (Table 1).

The students were attending eight public schools, two in Braga (Portugal) and six in Cádiz (Spain). They were schools with middle and middle-low socioeconomic status.

### Measures

**Adolescent Future Expectations Scale (EEFA)** (Sánchez-Sandoval & Verdugo, 2016). This 14-item self-report scale allows us to know how adolescents think their future is going to be like in a few years. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*I am sure that will not happen*) to 5 (*I am sure that will happen*). It includes four dimensions: *economic expectations* (job prospects and acquisition of material resources, e.g. "I will find a job"), *academic expectations* (level of study expected, e.g. "I will complete Secondary Education"), *expectations of personal well-being* (possibilities of developing social relations and issues related to health and safety, e.g. "I will be confident"), and *family expectations* (possibilities to form a stable family, have children and so on, e.g. "I will have children"). Higher scores indicate more positive expectations about the events' occurring in the future. The results obtained from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the scale with the Portuguese sample were also satisfactory ( $\chi^2=87.68$ ,  $df=67$ ;  $p=.04$ ; CFI=.97; NNFI=.96; IFI=.97; MFI=.96; RMSEA=.03).

Result of the test of configural invariance in multi-group (Spain and Portugal) revealed an acceptable fit ( $\chi^2=297.1$ ,  $df=142$ ;  $p<.001$ ; CFI=.932; RMSEA=.045). When the factor pattern coefficients were constrained to be equal, metric invariance was supported ( $\chi^2=313.4$ ,  $df=156$ ;  $p<.001$ ; CFI=.913; RMSEA=.049). The increase in  $\chi^2$  ( $\Delta\chi^2=16.3$ ,  $df=14$ ) was not statistically significant ( $p>.05$ ), while the increase in CFI ( $\Delta\text{CFI}=.01$ ) did not exceed the cut-off point of .01 proposed by Cheung and Rensvold (2002).

Global scale and subscales showed acceptable reliability ( $\alpha=.84$  and McDonald's Omega ( $\Omega$ )=.89 for the global scale in the total sample). The coefficients were as follows in the Spanish and in the Portuguese subsample, respectively: *global scale*,  $\alpha=.86/.83$ ; *economic expectations*,  $\alpha=.78/.76$ ; *academic expectations*,  $\alpha=.83/.58$ ; *expectations of personal well-being*,  $\alpha=.62/.67$  and *family expectations*,  $\alpha=.72/.70$ . The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite reliability (CR) were .44/.44 and .70/.69 for the *global scale*, .43/.40 and .74/.71 for the *economic expectations*; .66/.35 and .78/.56 for the *academic expectations*; .40/.41 and .60/.61 for the *expectations of personal well-being* and .40/.36 and .60/.56 for the *family expectations*.

**Self Esteem Scale (RSE)** (Rosenberg, 1965). The Spanish version by Martín-Albo, Núñez, Navarro, and Grijalvo (2007) and the Portuguese version by Santos and Maia (2003) were used. This 10-item scale measures global self-worth. Responses are rated on a 4-point Likert-scale. High scores reflect high self-esteem. It showed satisfactory levels of internal consistency ( $\alpha=.76$  and  $\Omega=.82$  in the total sample,  $\alpha=.66$  in the Spanish subsample, and  $\alpha=.80$  in the Portuguese subsample). The AVE and CR were .41/.31 and .67/.77, respectively.

**Student's Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS)** (Pavot & Diener, 1993). We used the Spanish version by Galíndez and Casas (2010) and the Portuguese version by Marques, Pais-Ribeiro, and Lopez (2007). The SLSS contains seven statements about general life satisfaction rated on a 6-point Likert scale. Higher scores on this measure indicate greater life satisfaction. The SLSS performed well with our sample of Spanish and Portuguese students ( $\alpha=.79$ , for both groups and  $\Omega=.84$  in the total sample). The AVE and CR were .43/.42 and .78/.78, respectively.

**General Self-Efficacy Scale (Baessler & Schwarzer, 1996)**. We used the Spanish version (Sanjuán Suárez et al., 2000) and the Portuguese version (Nunes, Schwarzer, & Jerusalem, 1999). This 10-item scale measures children's stable belief about their ability to appropriately manage a wide range of life stressors. Each item is rated on a 10-point Likert-type scale. Internal consistency analysis in the current study yielded  $\alpha=.87$  and  $\Omega=.88$  (Spanish subsample:  $\alpha=.86$ , Portuguese subsample:  $\alpha=.89$ ). The AVE and CR were .40/.47 and .83/.86, respectively.

The reliability and validity of the last three scales have been demonstrated in other studies with adolescent populations (e.g. Reina et al., 2010).

### Procedure

We contacted the selected schools and requested their participation in the study. After receiving the consent of the schools and families, classrooms were visited. The research project was accepted by the Doctoral Committee of the University of Cádiz (Spain). Permission was obtained from the local educational authorities and from the School Council in each center. Student participation was anonymous and voluntary. Questionnaire administration was completed in whole class groups and in a school period of 15 minutes. All measures were self-reported.

**Table 1**  
Distribution of sociodemographic variables

	Total	Spain	Portugal		p
Sex					
Girls	45.3%	48.7%	41.9%	$\chi^2(1)=2.448$	.07
Boys	55.7%	51.3%	58.1%		
Age					
M (SD)	12.54 (.77)	12.52 (.71)	12.55 (.82)	$t(532)=-.559$	.57

M (SD) = Mean (Standard Deviation).

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics and correlations between measures of the study

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Global EEFA	–	.82**	.65**	.72**	.70**	.34*	.29**	.42**	–.14 <sup>†</sup>
2. Economic expectations	.88**	–	.38**	.49**	.52**	.27*	.21*	.34**	–.00
3. Academic expectations	.73**	.55**	–	.25**	.17**	.28*	.19*	.24**	–.31**
4. Well-being expectations	.64**	.49**	.28**	–	.56**	.36**	.28**	.39**	–.06
5. Family expectations	.67**	.52**	.20**	.50**	–	.17**	.19*	.33**	.04
6. Self-esteem	.51**	.41**	.34**	.49**	.32**	–	.47**	.42**	–.10
7. Life satisfaction	.56**	.46**	.45**	.40**	.36**	.54**	–	.43**	–.15 <sup>†</sup>
8. Self-efficacy	.40**	.32**	.33**	.30**	.28**	.33**	.31**	–	–.13 <sup>†</sup>
9. Age	–.22**	–.17**	–.30**	–.03	–.09	–.15 <sup>†</sup>	–.16**	–.21**	–
M (SD)	4.18 (.48)	4.13 (.56)	4.04 (.84)	4.32 (.55)	4.27 (.64)	3.13 (.45)	4.16 (.97)	7.17 (1.48)	12.54 (.77)

Note. Portuguese scores in upper-right section and Spanish scores in lower-left section.

EEFA = Adolescent Future Expectations Scale; M (SD) = Mean (Standard Deviation).

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences PASW Statistics for Windows (version 18.0), FACTOR, EQS 6.2 and AMOS. We present descriptive results, and the relations between the variables in bivariate correlation analyses. To analyze the differences by sex and nationality, the non-parametric Mann–Whitney test was used, because data did not follow a normal distribution. Some regression analysis models were performed. The dependent variable was Future Expectations, and several independent variables were included in the model: First step (sex, age, nationality); and second step (self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy). We tested different models for each Future Expectation dimension. Finally, we construct two Structural Equation Models in order to study the positive causal effect of psychosocial adjustment on the Future Expectations of Spanish and Portuguese adolescents.

### Results

#### Descriptive statistics and correlations between future expectations and self-perception measures

Table 2 shows the correlations between the variables future expectations (global and subscales), self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy. In the upper-right part are the correlation coefficients of the Portuguese sample, and in the lower-left part are those of the Spanish sample. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) of the two countries for each of the study variables are also included.

In general, the results revealed positive, moderate, and statistically significant correlations among the variables under study. Economic/labor expectations were positively correlated with academic, well-being, and family expectations ( $r = .49$ – $.55$  in Spain and  $.38$ – $.52$  in Portugal). Well-being and family expectations showed high positive correlations in both countries ( $r = .50$  and  $.56$ , for Spain and Portugal, respectively), and smaller but also significant and positive correlations with academic expectations (correlations between  $.17$  and  $.28$ ).

In relation to self-perceptions, global future expectations are correlated significantly and positively with self-esteem ( $r = .51/.34$ , Spanish and Portuguese sample, respectively), life satisfaction ( $r = .56/.29$ ), and self-efficacy ( $r = .40/.42$ ). Each dimension of future expectations shows smaller but also mostly significant and positive correlations with self-esteem ( $r = .32$ – $.49/.17$ – $.36$ , for Spain and Portugal, respectively), life satisfaction ( $r = -.36$ – $.46/.19$ – $.28$ ) and self-efficacy ( $r = .28$ – $.33/.24$ – $.39$ ). Spanish correlations are somewhat higher than Portuguese correlations.

#### Comparisons by age, sex, and nationality

As shown in Table 2 global future expectations as well as academic expectations correlated negatively with age; older adolescents have lower expectations. In the Spanish sample, age also correlated significantly and negatively with economic/labor expectations.

Table 3 shows the results of the non-parametric means contrast (Mann–Whitney U).

Tests of univariate normality (K–S) were performed previously (global future expectations,  $z = 1.509$ ,  $p < .05$ ; economic/labor expectations,  $z = 2.106$ ,  $p < .001$ ; academic expectations,  $z = 3.301$ ,  $p < .001$ ; well-being expectations,  $z = 3.828$ ,  $p < .001$ ; family expectations,  $z = 3.379$ ,  $p < .001$ ; self-esteem,  $z = 1.540$ ,  $p < .05$ ; life satisfaction,  $z = 1.824$ ,  $p < .05$  and self-efficacy,  $z = 1.784$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

The results revealed significant differences only in the dimension of academic expectations ( $U = 29,668.500$ ,  $z = -3.229$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $r = .13$ ), with girls displaying higher expectations. Sex differences in self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy were nonsignificant ( $p > .05$ ).

To determine possible differences in these adolescents' future expectations depending on their nationality, we performed the Mann–Whitney U-test. The results revealed that Spanish adolescents had higher academic ( $U = 32,179.000$ ,  $z = -1.967$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r = .08$ ) and family expectations ( $U = 32,022.000$ ,  $z = -2.067$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r = .08$ ) than Portuguese adolescents.

In terms of self-perceptions, the Spanish adolescents had on average significantly higher levels of self-esteem ( $U = 24,571.500$ ,  $z = -6.225$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .26$ ) and life satisfaction ( $U = 27,259.500$ ,  $z = -4.709$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .20$ ) than the Portuguese. There were no

**Table 3**  
Results in the study variables according sex and nationality (Mann–Whitney *U* contrast test)

	Boys M (SD)	Girls M (SD)	<i>p</i>	Spaniards M (SD)	Portuguese M (SD)	<i>p</i>
1. Global expectations	4.18 (.48)	4.19 (.47)	–	4.20 (.52)	4.16 (.42)	–
2. Economic/labor expectations	4.16 (.57)	4.09 (.55)	–	4.14 (.62)	4.12 (.49)	–
3. Academic expectations	3.94 (.87)	4.18 (.78)	**	4.06 (.95)	4.03 (.71)	*
4. Well-being expectations	4.34 (.52)	4.30 (.58)	–	4.35 (.56)	4.30 (.53)	–
5. Family expectations	4.29 (.63)	4.23 (.64)	–	4.30 (.68)	4.23 (.59)	*
6. Self-esteem	3.15 (.41)	3.10 (.49)	–	3.24 (.40)	3.01 (.46)	**
7. Life satisfaction	4.20 (.91)	4.12 (1.04)	–	4.35 (.97)	3.97 (.94)	**
8. Self-efficacy	7.22 (1.38)	7.11 (1.59)	–	7.15 (1.44)	7.20 (1.52)	–

*M* (SD) = Mean (Standard Deviation).

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 4**  
Summary of the regression analysis of variables predicting global future expectations and subscales

	Variables	<i>F</i>	$\Delta R^2$	$R^2$	$\beta$
Global future expectations	Age		.04		–.08
	Self-esteem		.18		.21
	Self-efficacy		.07		.25
	Life satisfaction	63.814**	.03	.32	.21
Economic/labor expectations	Age		.01		–.07
	Life satisfaction		.12		.18
	Self-efficacy		.04		.19
	Self-esteem	31.648*	.01	.18	.16
Well-being expectations	Age		.00		.01
	Self-esteem		.20		.30
	Self-efficacy		.05		.23
	Life satisfaction	47.793*	.01	.26	.10
Family expectations	Self-efficacy		.10		.20
	Life satisfaction		.04		.16
	Self-esteem	29.434*	.00	.14	.10

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

significant differences between the levels of *self-efficacy* of Spanish and Portuguese adolescents ( $U = 34,109.000$ ,  $z = -.862$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

#### Predictive capacity of the sociodemographic variables and self-perceptions for future expectations

Several multiple linear regression analyses were performed. All the scales (with the exception of the dimension of *academic expectations* ( $z = 3.301$ ,  $p < .001$ )) met the criteria of normality required to perform such analyses (*global future expectations*,  $z = .514$ ,  $p > .05$ ; *economic/labor expectations*,  $z = .723$ ,  $p > .05$ ; *well-being expectations*,  $z = 1.053$ ,  $p > .05$  and *family expectations*,  $z = 1.170$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Data showed the absence of collinearity.

For this purpose, we used the global scale and each subscale of the EFA as dependent variables, and sociodemographic and personal variables (self-perceptions) as independent variables. We used the stepwise method, including the sociodemographic variables (*age*, *sex*, and *nationality*) in the first step, and the personal variables (*self-esteem*, *life satisfaction* and *self-efficacy*) in the second step.

The regression equations included the predictive variables shown in Table 4. *Nationality* and *sex* were not statistically significant, so they were not regarded as predictors of *future expectations*.

Regarding *global future expectations*, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicates that these variables explain 32% of the variance of this scale. That percentage is explained by the adolescents' *age*, level of *self-esteem*, *self-efficacy*, and *life satisfaction*. The magnitude of the effect size of  $R$  ( $R^2$ ) indicates a medium-strength association (Cohen, 1988, 1992). These adolescents' *future expectations* increased along with their levels of *self-esteem*, *life satisfaction*, and *self-efficacy*, and as their *age* decreased.

The second model, which attempts to predict *economic/labor expectations*, also included four predictor variables (*age*, level of *life satisfaction*, *self-efficacy* and *self-esteem*), which explained 18% of the variance. The magnitude of the effect size of  $R$  indicates a medium-strength association ( $R^2 = .13$ ). These adolescents' *economic/labor expectations* increased along with their levels of *life satisfaction*, *self-efficacy* and *self-esteem*, and as their *age* decreased.

The third model includes four predictor variables (*age*, *self-esteem*, *self-efficacy* and *life satisfaction*) which, taken together, account for 26% of *personal well-being expectations*. The strength of association is medium. These adolescents' *personal well-being expectations* increase as they grow older, and as their levels of *self-esteem*, *self-efficacy*, and *life satisfaction* increase.

The last model includes three variables (level of *self-efficacy*, *life satisfaction*, and *self-esteem*) to predict *family expectations*. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicates that, conjointly, these variables explain 14% of the variance. The magnitude of the effect size of  $R$  ( $R^2$ ) was medium. According to the Beta values, these adolescents' *family expectations* increase as their levels of *self-efficacy*, *life satisfaction*, and *self-esteem* increase.

#### Predictive model on Spanish and Portuguese adolescents' future expectations

As a first step, the normality of the data, characteristics of skewness and kurtosis, and multivariate kurtosis Mardia coefficient were analyzed. Mardia coefficients obtained for each of the sub-samples outweighed the value limit of 5 established to be considered a multivariate normal distribution (Bentler, 2005). Therefore, the method of Robust Maximum Likelihood (RML) was used.

**Table 5**  
Setting indicators of the measurement models

Index	Value obtained		Limit criterion
	Spain	Portugal	
$\chi^2$	2.20	2.92	$\chi^2/df = >0$ and $<5$
NNFI	.93	.90	
CFI	.96	.94	
IFI	.96	.94	>.90
MFI	.97	.96	
RMSEA	.06	.08	<.08

NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = Bollen's fit index; MFI = McDonald's fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

**Table 6**  
Model correlation matrix for measured and latent variables (Spain variables and Portugal)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Economic/Occupational Ex.	–	.26*	.56*	.49*	.31*	.30*	.30*	.70*	.42*
2. Academic Ex.	.45*	–	.30*	.26*	.17*	.16*	.16*	.37*	.22*
3. Well-being Ex.	.53*	.40*	–	.56*	.35*	.33*	.34*	.79*	.48*
4. Family Ex.	.45*	.34*	.39*	–	.31*	.29*	.29*	.70*	.42*
5. Self-esteem	.51*	.38*	.44*	.38*	–	.52*	.52*	.44*	.74*
6. Life satisfaction	.51*	.38*	.44*	.37*	.52*	–	.49*	.42*	.70*
7. Self-efficacy	.34*	.26*	.30*	.25*	.35*	.35*	–	.42*	.70*
8. Future expectations (F1)	.78*	.58*	.68*	.58*	.65*	.65*	.44*	–	.60*
9. Psychological adjustment (F2)	.70*	.52*	.61*	.52*	.72*	.72*	.49*	.89*	–

Note. Portuguese coefficients in upper-right section and Spanish coefficients in lower-left section.

\*  $p < .05$ .

**Table 7**  
Standardized solution of the model (Spain)

	Standardized coefficient	Error variance	R <sup>2</sup>
EEFA – Economic/Occupational Ex.	.78	.61	.61
EEFA – Academic Ex.	.59	.80	.34
EEFA – Well-being Ex.	.68	.73	.46
EEFA – Family Ex.	.58	.81	.34
Psychological adjustment – self-esteem	.72	.68	.52
Psychological adjustment – life satisfaction	.72	.68	.53
Psychological adjustment – self-efficacy	.49	.87	.24
EEFA (F1)	.88*F2	.45D1	.78

EEFA = Adolescent Future Expectations Scale; Ex. = Expectations

**Table 8**  
Standardized solution of the model (Portugal)

	Standardized coefficient	Error variance	R <sup>2</sup>
EEFA – Economic/Occupational Ex.	.70	.71	.49
EEFA – Academic Ex.	.37	.92	.14
EEFA – Well-being Ex.	.79	.60	.63
EEFA – Family Ex.	.70	.71	.49
Psychological adjustment – self-esteem	.74	.66	.55
Psychological adjustment – life satisfaction	.70	.71	.49
Psychological adjustment – self-efficacy	.70	.71	.49
EEFA (F1)	.60*F2	.79D1	.36

EEFA = Adolescent Future Expectations Scale; Ex. = Expectations

The existing relationship between the variables included in the model shows the importance of them, revealing their standardized regression coefficients influence on the dependent variable. The results show optimal models for both subsamples, where it predicts a 78.9% variance in the explanation of the *future expectations* of Spanish adolescents and a 36.4% of Portuguese adolescents. All estimates were statistically significant and the models fit correctly (Table 5).

The correlation matrix between latent variables and indicators (Table 6) showed significant correlations ( $p < .05$ ).

Standardized regression coefficients reveal the influence of the variables included in the model on the dependent latent variable (Tables 7 and 8).

In Figures 1 and 2 both models can be seen with its corresponding data. Both measurement models show that all indicators presented high factorial loads, oscillating between .49 and .74.

## Discussion

In this work, we analyzed the future expectations of early adolescents during the current financial crisis in two countries with significant levels of youth unemployment. A first conclusion is that despite the real economic situation, the vision of the future of these boys and girls is positive. This positive outlook coincides with that reported in other studies in early adolescence (Sánchez-Sandoval, 2015). This situation seems to be a generalizable pattern across the two countries (Spain and Portugal). This is an important result, taking into account the high influence of this variable in achievement motivation. This present self-perception and future vision become more pessimistic in older children. Probably, their cognitive progress allows them to adapt their expectations more realistically with regard to their competences and possibilities and also to the contextual possibilities.

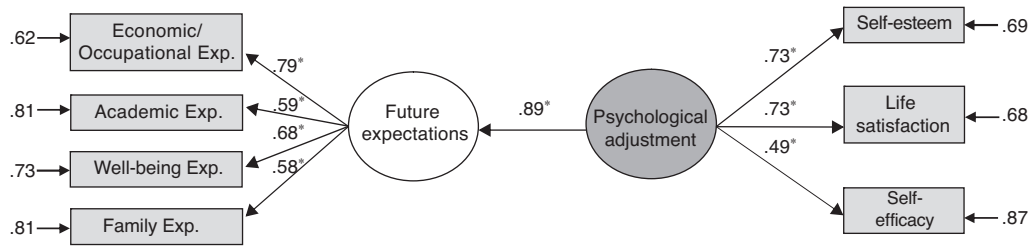


Figure 1. Structural equations model of future expectations (Spain).<sup>\*</sup>  $p < .05$ .

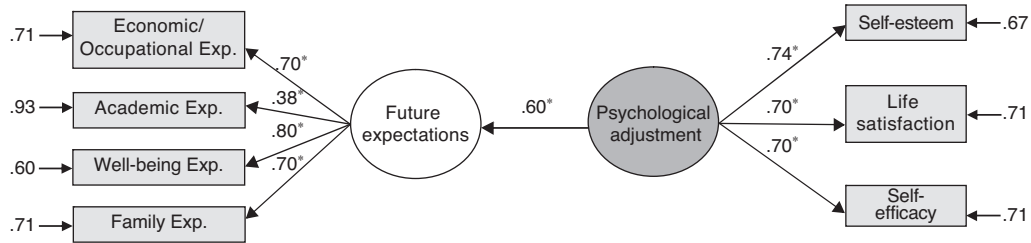


Figure 2. Structural equations model of future expectations (Portugal).<sup>\*</sup>  $p < .05$ .

Is it possible to identify variables related to the perceived likelihood of achieving one's goals in the future? The results presented are in line with the introduction: these adolescents' self-perceptions (self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy) are strongly related to their future expectations.

With regard to the first hypothesis of this study, we verified that there are significant relationships between self-perceptions and future expectations in countries like Spain and Portugal. As the adolescents express higher levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy, they also present higher future expectations. These results support other studies, like those of Amorós et al. (2002) who showed that young people's self-perceptions can affect the way they face the future. In this sense, having a good self-appraisal or self-perception and being aware of one's limitations can help one to face the present and the future. From a different perspective, recent researches (Mello & Chandler, 2016) have shown that adolescents who emphasize the future have higher self-esteem when compared to those boys and girls who focus solely on the present and those who focus on both the past and the future. Other authors point out achievement goals as a predictor variable of life satisfaction (Méndez-Giménez, Estrada, Fernández-Río, Alonso, & Saborit, 2017). In addition, other investigations also highlight that high levels of self-efficacy are related to success, good outcomes, and setting high goals and valuable objectives. In this way, higher perceptions of self-efficacy are related to higher self-set goals and to greater commitment and engagement in them (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

As to our second hypothesis (similarities between Spanish and Portuguese self-reports), some significant differences regarding adolescents' self-appraisals have been found. Spanish youngsters showed higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction. However, we found no significant differences in the variable of self-efficacy. This shows that, although self-esteem, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy are aspects of adolescents' self-perceptions, they are different facets, which it makes sense to study independently (Reina et al., 2010).

However, we cannot conclude that the Portuguese adolescents present low levels of self-perception. The descriptive analyses of both groups (Portuguese and Spanish) revealed high scores, considering the theoretical mean of the scales. These results are in the line with others showing the tendency of young Spaniards to make more positive self-appraisals in comparison to other European countries (INJUVE, 2012). In this sense, it would be interesting

to delve into this issue and perform a broader comparative study with the participation of a greater number of countries. This would allow us to compare the mean scores obtained by the participants and determine whether the early adolescents in this study really present high levels of self-perception in comparison to these others.

The results showed that there were also significant differences between the adolescents of both countries in terms of their future expectations. The Spanish adolescents showed higher academic and family expectations than the Portuguese adolescents. These data are qualified when taking the self-appraisals of the equation into account. It would be interesting to study other contextual variables that may be related to the lower future expectations of the Portuguese adolescents in these dimensions. Perhaps, socioeconomic and political issues of the country in question could be related to these results.

A third hypothesis of this work was focused on the predictive capacity of these personal (self-perceptions, age, and sex) and contextual variables (nationality) for future expectations. Regression analyses showed that neither sex nor nationality were regarded as predictors of future expectations. Other personal variables predicted these expectations. The differences that we have found between both countries, using the *U* Mann-Whitney test, disappear when we control the self-esteem variable. Definitely, country differences in self-perceptions explain country differences in future expectations. These results leave some interesting issues open.

It would be important to examine whether the cultural aspect could be considered a predictor of future expectations, taking into account other countries. One of the reasons why nationality was not considered a predictor in this work could be the cultural similarity between these two countries and the similar economic constraints, which are currently present in the entire southern European area. One might expect that, although orientation toward the future is influenced by psychosocial and cognitive development, the context in which the individual develops will also play an important role, both in the structure and the content of future orientation (McCabe & Barnett, 2000; Nurmi, 1991). These projections (of future expectations) do not occur in a vacuum, these adolescents are not isolated from the context in which they develop their expectations. As defended by Bajoit (2003), the selection of the pathway will have greater or fewer chances of being carried out depending on the restrictions imposed by the context in which the adolescents live.

Regarding the age, our data corroborate the more negative view, as they grow older, although the age range we analyzed was not really wide. Most adolescents are the same age. Related to this issue, Frydenberg (1997) has found that the expectations experienced by adolescents change from a positive perspective, related to the social and academic challenges of this new stage, to a pessimistic perspective because of the failure or because adolescents do not see their expectations met. In this sense, it would be interesting to carry out a longitudinal study, which can contribute to understand this relevant question.

There are few sex-related differences in our study. Authors like Nurmi (1991) had observed sex differences with regard to the content of future expectations. In our case, only academic expectations were significantly higher in girls. These data do not corroborate those of other studies showing that girls are more focused on family-related goals, whereas boys tend to propose education- and occupational-related goals. Our data agree with those of Kerpelman and Schvaneveldt (1999), who found that girls had higher education-related goals, hopes, and plans. If our data are supported by other works, this would imply a more positive reality concerning equality between men and women in the academic field at the short term, and in the work setting at the medium and long term.

Regarding the last hypothesis, the structural equations models confirmed the influence of psychological adjustment variables and its explanatory power on the future expectations of these adolescents. In this respect, self-esteem, life satisfaction and self-efficacy have an important role in these expectations. The need for constructing two different models, one for each country, is to corroborate that these variables (self-evaluations) work the same way in both countries. The percentage of variance explained in the Spanish subsample (78.9%) was higher than that obtained in the Portuguese subsample (36.4%). In this sense, it would be important to study other variables, either personal or contextual (cultural family issues, among others), which could have a considerable influence on the future expectations of Portuguese adolescents.

We can conclude by stressing the idea defended by García-Viniegas (2005), who pointed out that high self-esteem is a positive self-appraisal that produces satisfaction and personal enjoyment, and at the same time can produce behaviors aimed at achieving goals (adequate level of aspiration), which, in turn, produces satisfaction and well-being, and reinforces self-esteem. There are also studies showing that achievement of self-set goals contributes to the realization of one's life plan and, therefore, to increasing one's sense of well-being or satisfaction. In this sense, the satisfaction of needs, desires, or the achievement of goals produces very positive emotions (Díaz Morales & Sánchez López, 2002). On the contrary, recent studies (Moksnes, Bradley Eilertsen, & Lazarewicz, 2016) have shown that individuals with low self-esteem are considered to have fewer coping resources. Probably, they will have problems to see beyond the present and have a future perspective. So in this case interventions and actions by professionals are really needed.

This study highlights some important future research guidelines. With results in mind, it is possible to point out other important aspects that influence these expectations, related to both individual (e.g., coping strategies, emotional and behavioral problems, school adjustment) and contextual (social adjustment, family variables). Research on these aspects will allow a more complete model that would improve the prediction of future expectations. The participation of a greater number of countries that are culturally and socioeconomically more diverse would have allowed us to analyze more deeply whether the cultural factor can be considered a predictor of future expectations in early adolescence. Besides, it would have been interesting to include one or more countries for comparison that do not experience economic

crisis, or to compare adolescents before and after changes in economy. For future research, we should make greater efforts to include these aspects in the study and thus gain a broader and more comprehensive perspective. We should also include older adolescents in order to analyze possible changes along age.

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